

GEORGE WASHINGTON MEMORIAL PARKWAY

Safety Improvements

14th Street Bridge and Columbia Island



NEWS

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY and PUBLIC MEETING

An **Environmental Assessment for Roadway and Trail Safety Improvements, George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP)** has been completed and will be available for review and comment beginning **March 28, 2002**. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division has prepared this document, in cooperation with the National Park Service, in order to provide guidance in determining the appropriate actions needed to perform the safety improvements for the GWMP.

A **Public Information Meeting** to discuss the George Washington Memorial Parkway Safety Improvements Study Alternatives is scheduled for **Thursday, March 28, 2002** from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the Aurora Hills Recreation Center. The center is located at 735 18th Street South, Arlington, VA 22202.

Copies of the EA will be available at the Public Information Meeting. The EA will also be available for public review at the following locations:

- Superintendent's office, National Park Service, George Washington Memorial Parkway, Turkey Run Park, McLean, VA;
- Division Engineer's office, FHWA, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, 21400 Ridgetop Circle, Sterling, VA;
- Aurora Hills Library, 735 18th Street South, Arlington, VA;
- and on the World Wide Web at www.efl.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/nepa.htm.

Additional copies of the EA may be obtained by writing to Mr. Jack Van Dop, Environmental Specialist, FHWA, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, 21400 Ridgetop Circle, Sterling, Virginia 20166. If you have any additional questions concerning the EA, please contact Mr. Jack Van Dop at (703) 404-6282.

Please submit all comments on the proposed safety improvements by the closing of the comment period on **April 28, 2002**.

BACKGROUND

The George Washington Memorial Parkway (GWMP) is mostly located in Virginia, on the west side of the Potomac River. The Parkway extends from the Capital Beltway (I-495) on the northern end to Slaters Lane in Alexandria on the southern end. The Columbia Island portion of the GWMP is located in the District of Columbia. A number of recreational, historical and memorial sites are also located along the GWMP, including Theodore Roosevelt Island Park, the Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) Memorial Grove, the Navy-Marine Memorial and Columbia Island Marina. The Mount Vernon Trail, a bicycle and pedestrian route, extends along the GWMP and the Potomac River from Theodore Roosevelt Island to Mt. Vernon, south of the City of Alexandria.

A planning and environmental study is underway by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division, and the National Park Service (NPS), GWMP Unit, to identify roadway and bicycle/pedestrian improvements necessary to safely and efficiently accommodate motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists and others using the GWMP. Since its initiation in January 2001, the GWMP Safety Improvements Study has progressed through the information gathering, alternatives evaluation, and analysis and recommendations phases.

Improvement alternatives have been developed for four areas of the GWMP in the vicinity of the I-395 interchange and 14th Street Bridge:

1. Columbia Island Marina Entrance
2. Southbound I-395 Ramp to Northbound GWMP and the Humpback Bridge
3. Northbound I-395 Ramp to Northbound GWMP
4. Southbound GWMP Ramp to Southbound I-395



Initial safety improvement options for each of the above areas of concern were developed using an initial set of alternatives derived from prior studies as a starting point. Additional alternatives were identified based upon an analysis of current and projected traffic counts and forecasts, geometric design standards, GWMP accident information, and input from agency and public involvement. After a preliminary evaluation of the potential safety improvements, those determined to be the most environmentally and economically feasible and desirable to FHWA and NPS decision-makers have been retained for further evaluation.

ALTERNATIVES RETAINED FOR DETAILED STUDY

The following alternatives, including the No Action alternative, were retained for detailed study.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No Action Alternative involves retaining the Columbia Island Marina entrance and related circulation/turning patterns; keeping the at-grade, pedestrian crossing of the GWMP in its present location; and retaining the small parking lot serving the Navy-Marine Memorial and Lady Bird Johnson Park. No modifications would be made to the vehicular travel lanes or Mt. Vernon Trail crossing of the existing GWMP Boundary Channel Bridge No. 3300-020P, also known as the Humpback Bridge, to address pedestrian-bicycle-motor vehicle safety concerns associated with the bridge crossing. The safety and design deficiencies associated with the GWMP ramps – the southbound I-395 ramp to northbound GWMP, the southbound GWMP ramp to southbound I-395, and the northbound I-395 ramp to northbound GWMP – would not be addressed and the ramps would continue in operation.



COLUMBIA ISLAND MARINA ENTRANCE

Preferred Alternative: Relocate Marina Entrance



This alternative involves closing the Columbia Island Marina entrance on the GWMP and relocating it to Boundary Channel Drive to the west. The turn lanes, acceleration and deceleration lanes in the GWMP median would be removed and the median closed to turning traffic. A two-lane bridge would be constructed over Boundary Channel to connect Boundary Channel Drive with the existing marina parking lot. The new bridge would accommodate two vehicle travel lanes (one in each direction) and an accessible sidewalk.

Boundary Channel Drive is part of the Pentagon Reservation and under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense (DOD). A permit has been requested from DOD for access to Boundary Channel Drive for the new marina entrance and bridge. As an *interim measure*, until DOD approval is obtained, the FHWA and NPS propose to reconfigure the Columbia Island Marina entrance on the GWMP for right turns only. The center median of the GWMP would be closed to turning traffic and marina traffic would be limited to right in/right out access.

SOUTHBOUND I-395 RAMP TO NORTHBOUND GWMP AND HUMPBACK BRIDGE

Alternative A: Construct Acceleration Lane and a Second, Parallel Bridge

This alternative involves constructing a second bridge across Boundary Channel, parallel to the Humpback Bridge. The existing bridge would be modified to accommodate a northbound acceleration lane for the I-395 off-ramp, two northbound travel lanes and a widened Mt. Vernon Trail with a barrier between the trail and vehicle travel lanes. The new bridge would accommodate the two southbound GWMP travel lanes. Additionally, the vertical profile of the Humpback Bridge and its approaches would be modified to increase the sight distance and conform to recommended design standards.



Alternative A also involves eliminating the existing at-grade crosswalk and small parking lot serving the Navy-Marine Memorial and constructing pedestrian/bicycle underpasses to the north and south of the Humpback Bridge. Sidewalks/trails would be constructed to connect the Columbia Island Marina parking lot with the Mt. Vernon Trail and Navy-Marine Memorial, via the northern underpass. Modifications to the Mt. Vernon Trail would be made to link the existing trail with both underpasses. A new trail connection would be constructed along the south edge of the Boundary Channel lagoon to link the Pentagon/Boundary Channel Drive with the GWMP and Mt. Vernon Trail via the southern underpass.

Alternative B: Construct Acceleration Lane and Widen the Existing Bridge

Alternative B involves widening the Humpback Bridge on its west side. The widened structure would accommodate a northbound acceleration lane for the I-395 ramp, two northbound vehicle travel lanes and two southbound vehicle travel lanes. The expanded bridge would also accommodate a wider Mt. Vernon Trail crossing with a barrier between the trail and vehicular traffic. As with Alternative A, the vertical profile of the Humpback Bridge and its approaches would be modified to conform to recommended design standards. Additional crosswalk and trail modifications, as discussed for Alternative A, are also included in Alternative B.

Preferred Alternative: Construct Acceleration Lane and a New Bridge

The preferred alternative involves the demolition of the Humpback Bridge and construction of a replacement bridge to include: a widened Mt. Vernon Trail crossing with a barrier between the trail and vehicular traffic, a northbound acceleration lane for the ramp from southbound I-395 to northbound GWMP, two northbound travel lanes and two southbound travel lanes. The vertical profile of the existing bridge would be corrected and addressed in the design of the new bridge. The design of the new bridge would incorporate the underpasses and other pedestrian trail modifications discussed in Alternatives A and B.

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED BUT DECISION DEFERRED

The closure of two ramps at the GWMP and I-395 interchange – the northbound I-395 ramp to northbound GWMP and the southbound GWMP ramp to southbound I-395 – was also evaluated in the safety improvements study. The NPS has deferred selection of a preferred alternative or action/no action for the proposed ramp closures until the completion of a more extensive evaluation by the FHWA of the transportation needs of the I-395/14th Street corridor in Virginia and the District of Columbia, including the GWMP/I-395 interchange. Therefore, no preferred alternative has been selected at this time.

NORTHBOUND I-395 RAMP TO NORTHBOUND GWMP

Alternative: Eliminate Ramp

This alternative involves closing the left-side ramp from northbound I-395 to northbound GWMP. Traffic currently utilizing this ramp would be diverted to the following alternate routes:

1. Northbound I-395 to VA 27 to northbound GWMP.
2. Northbound I-395 to northbound Boundary Channel Drive to northbound VA 27 to northbound GWMP.

SOUTHBOUND GWMP RAMP TO SOUTHBOUND I-395

Alternative: Eliminate Ramp

This alternative involves closing the ramp from southbound GWMP to southbound I-395. Traffic currently utilizing this ramp would be diverted to the following alternate routes:

1. Southbound GWMP to southbound VA 27 to southbound I-395.
2. Southbound GWMP to southbound VA 27 to southbound Boundary Channel Drive to southbound I-395. Traffic bound for U.S. Route 1 or the Crystal City, located south of the existing ramp and the Study Area, would be able to use southbound GWMP to southbound VA 27 to southbound Boundary Channel Drive to southbound Old Jefferson Davis Highway to access Route 1/Crystal City.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

While the Parkway was originally constructed to commemorate the first president, preserve the natural setting along the Potomac River and provide a fittingly grand and scenic entryway for visitors to the nation's capital, it has evolved into a primary commuter route between Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. With the increase in traffic volumes and speeds, the GWMP now exhibits interstate traffic characteristics. Regular users of the Parkway commonly display high-speed aggressive driving habits that can frequently result in unsafe traffic maneuvers and accidents. Visitors to the Washington, DC area, while in the minority in the traffic stream, are also frequent users of the GWMP. They can be characterized by unsure and slower driving habits and are typically being pushed along at faster speeds than they would normally go by the prevailing commuter traffic flows.

Motorist Safety

According to NPS records, seven of the top ten accident sites on the GWMP are located in the segment between the Arlington Memorial Bridge and Ronald Reagan National Airport. The southbound I-395/George Mason Bridge ramp to northbound GWMP, near Location 2, was identified as the location of the most accidents. Location 1, the intersection of the Columbia Island Marina/Navy-Marine Memorial entrance and the GWMP, was the seventh most frequent accident site. Locations 3 and 4 have also been identified in previous NPS and FHWA studies as high accident locations.



In addition to the frequency of accidents, a number of the study locations exhibit operational and design deficiencies that raise safety concerns and result in regular traffic delays and congestion. Locations 2 and 3 are frequent congestion points due to deficient ramp and roadway design.

Bicyclist and Pedestrian Safety

Locations 1 and 2 raise concerns for bicyclist and pedestrian safety. While an at-grade crosswalk is located just north of Location 1, the entrance to the Columbia Island Marina and Navy-Marine Memorial, most trail users crossing back and forth between the east side and the west side of the GWMP at this location do not use it. Many find it more convenient to cross at the marina entrance, often stopping in the roadway median to wait for a break in the traffic, where they conflict with vehicle traffic.



Location 2 is the site of the Humpback Bridge. The Parkway and bike trail approaches to the bridge are steep, resulting in poor sight distance for both the motorist and the trail user. At the bridge, the trail narrows from about eight feet to approximately six feet in width. A concrete curb is all that separates bicycle and pedestrian traffic from vehicle traffic. No other protective separation between the trail and roadway is provided.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process is in its final phase. Steps in the process include:

- ⇒ **Information Gathering**
 - ✓ Identify Issues and Concerns
 - ✓ Public Information Meeting
- ⇒ **Develop and Evaluate Alternatives**
 - ✓ Analyze Data Gathered
 - ✓ Develop Candidate Alternatives
- ⇒ **Environmental Assessment (EA) of the Proposed Action**
 - ✓ Analyze Potential Impacts and Select a Preferred Alternative
 - ✓ Publication of EA for Public Review
 - ✓ Public Information Meeting
- ⇒ **Final Recommendations and Decision Document**
 - ✓ Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Public Information Meeting was held at the Aurora Hills Community Center in Arlington County on June 19, 2001 and at the National Park Service, National Capital Region Headquarters in Washington, DC on June 20, 2001 to allow the general public to be involved in the planning process and to keep them informed of the project status. Interested citizens and interest groups have been invited to attend these meetings. The meetings provided an opportunity to ask questions and offer comments as issues and concerns were identified and alternatives developed and analyzed.

Verbal or written comments were requested from interested citizens and groups. Fourteen people attended the June 19th meeting and five people attended the June 20th meeting. Most meeting attendees were interested in proposed pedestrian/bicycle improvements and expressed support for the Mt. Vernon Trail recommendations. Several attendees were interested in the ramp closure proposals and expressed concern about the traffic impacts of the proposed closures on alternative routes.

In addition, written comments were received from ten individuals. Most of the comments were in support of a wider Mt. Vernon Trail crossing of the Humpback Bridge and grade-separated underpass connections to the Columbia Island Marina and Pentagon/Arlington County. Of the comments addressing modifications to the marina entrance, there was a 2 to 1 margin in support of modifying the entrance to right in/out and opinion was split 50/50 for the relocation of the entrance to Boundary Channel Drive. Signalizing the existing entrance was also suggested. The only comments received that addressed the closing of the two GWMP/I-395 ramps, opinion were from individuals opposing the proposed closures. An additional comment was received in support of improving the acceleration/deceleration lanes for the ramps.

Written comments and verbal comments from the first meetings were compiled and incorporated in the safety improvement alternatives carried forward for further evaluation.

Public Information Meeting Two

A final Public Information Meeting to discuss the George Washington Memorial Parkway Safety Improvements will be held as follows:

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 2002

5:00 PM TO 7:00 PM

Aurora Hills Community Center
735 18TH Street South.
Arlington, VA 22202

The meeting will be held in the center's meeting room. Parking is available adjacent to the recreation center.

The safety improvement alternatives that have been carried forward for further evaluation and inclusion in the *Environmental Assessment for Roadway and Trail Safety Improvements, George Washington Memorial Parkway* will be presented at the meeting. The EA will also be available at the meeting for review and comment.

If you are unable to attend the Public Information Meeting, written comments should be postmarked by **April 28, 2002** and sent to:

Mr. Jack Van Dop, Environmental Compliance Specialist
Federal Highway Administration
Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division
21400 Ridgetop Circle
Sterling, VA 20166-6511
FAX (703) 404-6217

PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Project newsletters have been published during the planning process to inform the general public and interest groups about the findings of the study and the project status. To obtain copies of the newsletters (Number 1, June 2001, and Number 2, March 2002), please contact Ms. Christine Hoeffner at (703) 742-5873.

If you know of any individuals and/or organizations interested in this study that would like to receive project newsletters or attend public meetings, please provide their name and address.

Thank you.

To be added to the mailing list, send your name and address to:

Ms. Christine Hoeffner
Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc.
465 Spring Park Place
Herndon, VA 20170
FAX (703) 742-5797